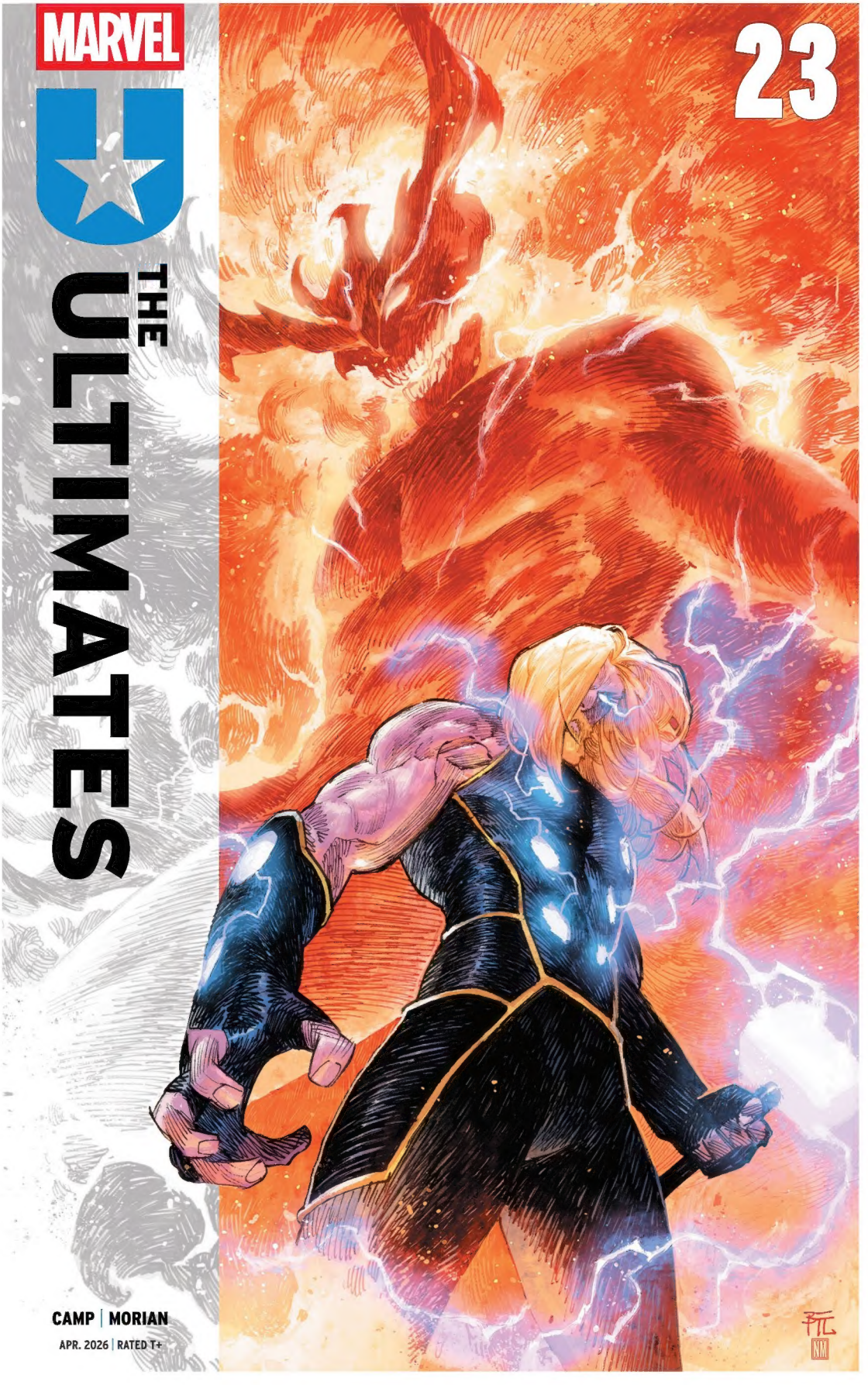
MARVEL
THE ULTIMATES
23
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Lo!
There was a time when the old gods lived!
And warred in wide, star-strewn skies.
Lightning-lords and ladies with bright,
brilliant swords,
Ideities, great-girthed, grim,
Gathered against Sky-King Lie King Loki's
Limitless unliving legions!

And for the gods, strangely, stood **Surtur,**
Fire-starter, star-scorcher, Asgard-Ender,
Ragnarok-bound ruin-bringer,
equal of All-Fathers!

Lean Loki, lithe and lashed by long war,
Disdaining the doom of those dire odds,
Desperate, dark-eyed, dreadful
Ransacks Asgard's royal reserves,
Unsealing secret, savage relics,
Weapons withheld for their wild, world-wrecking ways,
Crates cradling cold, creeping cataclysms,
Armor aching to annihilate the stars.

And so new names now enter the fray,
Fresh fighters flooding flaming fields
As Mangog, monster made of billion, billion beings,
Bears boundless brawn and brimming bile,
Extinguishes every ember of uprising,
Smothers sparks of stubborn rebellion!
Promised, as prize, the purging of gods
And the resurrection of his ruined race.

Against bright, blazing, bloodthirsty Surtur,
Loki sends his savage Destroyer!
Nicely named: Built in blind, bygone billions of years,
To counter Celestials! the cold, cosmic gods.
SM
Now it faces fire, fierce and incarnate!
The struggle with Surtur shatters spinning star systems!
Galaxies glow like ghostly, gutted galleons!
A hot, humming havoc hammers through all things!

In Vanaheim, vast verdant gods rise,
Finally fight back, forsaking gentle nature,
Revealing rooted, savage side!
Even the birds and the bees enlist--
Life-making lessons traded for life-taking.
Time turns tricky when gods make war,
Minutes stretch to millennia, millennia melt to moments.
Only yesterday did Thor and Sif
Steal silent, sacred hours beneath the ash,
Only yesterday Thor strode out to strike his secret, soot-stained deal.
Only yesterday, but an eternity between them.

War widens,
A whirring, working industry!
In Nidavellir, stone-studded smithworld,
Dwarves, aided by Aesir, seize the sovereign means of making!
Furious foundries reforged, revolutionized,
Riding red-mouthed raging war-bears,
Stoneborn soldiers sling singing swords and snarling axes,
To grind, grapple and gut Asgard's greedy King!

I am Justice! I am vengeance! I am judgment!!!

I will erase your race as you did mine!

Meanwhile, Mangog marches, grief of the gods!
Glorious, grotesque, gore-greedy genocide-giant!
Whole hosts he harrows, divine divisions dashed,
Decimated with every sweep of arm or simple shrug!

Presented with this perilous vision,
Silent, stoic, steadfast Sif makes her decision,
Makes Mangog her mission,
Does not inform Thor (away on other business),
Returning the divine favor.

For forty fortnights they fight
(Or is it forty femtoseconds?)
Their rage wrecking realms, rending worlds.
Mangog means **might;** each blow a billion,
But Sif is speed, skill and stubborn will--
He cannot clutch, cannot strike.
Where she is flawless, florid, fleet!
In forty furious fortnights she neither falls nor falters.

Then comes the crux
A slipped stance,
a single, sudden chance!
Gods drive
hard bargains:

One soul for a billion, billion
Small sacrifice for the
fairest of the gods.

From high, haunted halls, Loki's loyal, long-suffering Valkyries descend, Dog-tired, disgusted, duty-driven.
Sif, seeing old friends, strains to speak, To seek some small, final favor, Finding none.
For Valkyries, Life and death are not so different. Duty is duty. A job a job.

Thor, in throes of terrible grief,
Uneducated in emotional expression,
Turns to tempest, gathers every gust and gale across all time
Hanging heavy over Asgard as the "All-Storm"!
Raining righteous, roaring wrath upon the realm,
A flood to rival even Jehovah!
Instead of doves, he delivers deadly lightnings
Turning night to day, day to unbearable blaze.
Stupid, staring subsidiary gods are struck sightless
Many swept away, tossed about,
Lost to the hurricane of his pain.

Sif's sacrifice sends sharp signal:
No more debate or delay, no hesitation.
So Surtur finds Fenris,
Sun-Eater, Age-Ender, Myth-Render
And, laughing, lifts Twilight,
Terrific, terrible, fire-forged falchion!
Then shatters that strange shackle:
strong, silken Gleipnir,
Freeing the wolf to finish
the fated universe.
SM

In Alfheim, Light Elves turn lethal
Craft cutting, creative ways to kill
Putting dream projects into practice
Plots to purge pixel-faced policemen,
Slipping in shanks, subversive sentences
Strangling suits with their own stories.
Copy-cops are cut and clawed by clauses,
Footnoted to death by diminutive daggers,
Syntax scrambled so all sense slips away.
Darlings die in droves, inspiration itself expires!
It isn't pretty, no stage-play spectacle, no poetry,
Just brutality, blood and brains
Falling, flooding, onto open floor plans.
The greatest gift writers get:
To write their own ending.

Many minds refuse the news of Ragnarok's rise,
But Hela, hard-hearted, high Queen of the Dead, doesn't flinch.
Familiar with mortality, mindful of endings magnificent and mundane,
She finds a fierce, fearful beauty in finality.
She signals Loki, sets the time and place
Where all will gather--gods and giants,
Muspell's searing sons, every realm's race
For the final, fated fight!
A battle to break, to bury, all battles!!!

And so Loki, lord of lies, musters all his might!
Deluded, determined to dominate
Deep down the devil discerns Götterdämmerung, deliverance,
But will not welcome it while he reigns.
So surge forth Frost Giants--
frozen, forlorn forms
Grumbling glaciers grown grotesque, godlike!
Each minor movement remakes the map,
Removing ridges, rewriting rivers!
Endless armies advance,
the disgraced, disinterred dead
All who ever lived:
heroes, horrors, saints and sinners.
Discussing devils,
Loki summons the dark,
Draws down deep,
dread magicks,
Primeval proto-powers,
potent and perilous!
Lusting after all who
live and love the light!
SM

And then the END!

Heimdall falls first
frustrating fate, foiling prophecy,
Still gripping hushed
Giallarhorn in hand,
Struck down by haughty Hela,
homicide in heels!

Surtur's soldiers, strewn in smoking swathes,
Fall upon corpse-corps, kindling into colossal pyres,
The smog of smoldering, staggering multitudes
Billows black across blasted battlefield.

Frost Giants fall to frozen fields
Gods sink, speared and silent,
into soiled swamps
Or sizzle, sublimating to steam
before Muspelheim's men!

At Yggdrasil's roots the Destroyer drives
to disintegrate Muspelheim's master
But shatters his shining sword, Twilight, instead!
Surtur, seething, still stands!
He slays the Skyfather Shell with bare hands,
melts it to slag,
Reforges a fresh, fell Twilight
And sets the sacred World Tree aflame!!!

Loki lays low Tyr laughing loud:
"Praise me for peace--I've ended war!"
Then wipes out Wodan's warriors in triplicate.

And snarling, savage Fenris stalks the sun across the sky.

Fenris frowns, feeling foolish
This isn't the Thor that he remembers
Then, drooling darkmatter, decides he doesn't care.

Finally, Fenris Wolf fulfills his function,
Swallowing the sun in one big bite,
then belches light and, sated and shameless, sinks to snoring sleep.

You've ruined everything! Like always!
Then it's back to brothers, bitterly bound,
Loki, lordly, godhead in full glory, gripping Gungnir,
Flooded with All-Father Force, for once formidable,
But still sloppy, stumbling.
Even weaker, Thor smoothly swats spear aside.
The two stand starkly, even matched,
For fighting was never Loki's forte,
Not since they were boys.

"Why, Thor?! Why?!" wails Wodan-Son, wild-eyed.

"Because, Brother: as above, **so below!**" bellows Thor.

"Drop the dull disguise, Loki,
It makes us seem small.
Change is your nature, cunning one!
What I see, you saw sooner!

"The Maker has unmoored us from the wheel,
Our circle-cycle, the secret of our strength.

"After Ragnarok comes **rebirth** and **rise.**
Without an ending, our epics are empty;
Without renewal, the mortal world moves not.

"In Asgard, we shall be shaped anew,
Purged of the Maker's mark, made modern, magnificent
Becoming the gods the growing world demands!

"Deities of different dreams, different dawns!
Gods of a new world's way!"

So with Asgard's amber halls ablaze,
Together, trembling, two gods of great, golden ages
Sit, swap stories, watch their world wane and wither.

One of the gods is I, Loki,
And one of the stories is **this** one.

There was a time when the old gods lived!
A time of Saturn-sized serpents
six-legged steeds
Talking heads and humorous,
harebrained schemes.

A time when time trudged slower,
where death was common,
When every face you met masked
god or giant in disguise
Winters were harsh, hard
and perhaps permanent.

We were gods of hammers,
of swords, of storm, sky and lie,
Whose every action expressed
our era's essential truths;
Sometimes petty, often brutal,
not meant to last forever.

There was a time
when the old gods lived...

...and there was a time when old gods died.
So that something new could come after.
STIPAN MORPAN

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